DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 396 CS 214 500

AUTHOR Thompson, Gary; Wolff, Janice
TITLE All Literature Is Argument.
PUB DATE Jul 94
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition (13th, University Park, PA, July 13-16, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Higher Education; *Ideology; *Literary Criticism; Rhetorical Criticism; Rhetorical Theory; Student Journals; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Aesthetic Reading; *Collaborative Teaching; Discourse; Essentialism; *Social Constructivism

ABSTRACT

In a collaborative effort in teaching literary analysis, two professors aimed to make the usually seamless act of reading visible and ideologically bound by emphasizing the constructed nature of interpretation. A course was pieced together that asked questions about literature, that assumed that both students and teachers are subjects constructed by and awash in ideologies. By foregrounding ideology, the course sought to demystify literature, to denaturalize the text. This departure from the more essentialized modes of teaching resulted in challenges from one professor to another. If one used the word "paradigm," the other demanded that he or she unpack it. Similarly, in their journals, the students, mostly non-majors, frustrated with the new way of teaching literature, found themselves, whether they realized it or not, asking questions about how a classroom is constructed. One student wrote in her journal: "I have never felt so completely helpless, clueless, and in the dark in a class before, as I do in this one." She felt that having two professors in the classroom was a "bit much." Her worry about dual leadership implies the interpellation of subjects in the classroom, the concern of who interpellates whom, who speaks from the subject position. These students were prepared to learn interpretations, not make them--that is, they brought a certain stock of cultural capital to class, i.e., that professors teach and students learn, that teachers are hired to give them the "right" readings of texts. (TB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

All Literature is Argument

Gary Thompson and Janice Wolff

Penn State Conference--1994

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
G. Thompson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

ED 375 396

Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.

--Louis Althusser

Imagine that you enter a conference room. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion; your only clue to what gives the discussion its heat is the session title, "Argument in Literature and Life" . . .

We started our team-teaching in Literary Analysis last fall with a handout I've used in other classes, paraphrased in the opening, a sort of a parable from Kenneth Burke.

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or the gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

This is an "argument" in process, in both the academic and colloquial senses of the word: that is, the "you" in the discussion not only waits an opportunity to enter the discussion, but seems to gather supporting evidence and to look for allies, and the "heat" in the discussion could potentially lead to fisticuffs. Whatever the subject, apparently some real issues are at stake here.

I generally open with this parable as a way of countering assumptions which most students bring to the class, those described by Paulo Freire as deriving from a "banking metaphor" of education; under this paradigm, we as professors are suppliers of educational or cultural capital, which we supply to our customers, the students, for a fee (tuition, books, etc.). But knowledge in English studies--composition and literature and literary theory and pretty much any corner of the field--is more and more seen, at present, as constructed--between text and encountering consciousness, between groups of readers functioning as interpretive communities, between the fusion of present-day and past horizons--theoretically eclectic (or is it eclectically theoretic), the classroom as site in which cultural capital is disseminated is a paradigm I no longer care to work within.

At the outset, then, we encouraged our sophomore-level general education students (mostly non-majors or -minors, with a smattering of students who would later concentrate in education and English) to think about the class as entering a conversation more or less along

CS214500

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the lines of Burke's parable, one in which they would have to absorb the discourse until they got the hang of it (hopefully sooner rather than later), and then join in. The principles here were to be those advocated by Gerald Graff, as well as by Donald McQuade, who was SVSU's consultant during our MLA-FIPSE curricular review: bring the students into the discussions now going on in English, because it's very much the case that issues vital to their lives are at stake in these discussions, not just our own professional stature and positioning.

To read literature now (you will note that we aren't all that fussy about separate categories for "reading literature" and "writing" and other areas of English studies--the reasons why should be clear later) is to be engaged in an argument. One side of that argument, if we can simplify it into two overarching tendencies, says that "literature" is composed of essences and aspires to make its interpretation "seamless," while another (ours, I believe) sees "literature" as constructed and wants to show the seams.

I'm drawing these categories from a recent paper on historiographies of rhetoric by Sharon Crowley, who in turn draws a schema from Diana Fuss in characterizing a split between *essentialist* and *constructionist* positions. "'Essentialism is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the "whatness" of a given entity'"; constructionists "do not assume that human nature has remained stable across time" or

> that linguistic or cultural categories represent natural, transhistorical realities. Since reality is mediated through language, constructionist historians posit that categories such as "human nature" and "rhetoric" are produced and modified within the discourse of a given community or culture in accordance with current social or political requirements.

[Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking. NY: Routledge, 1989; quoted by Sharon Crowley, "Let Me Get This Straight"--in Victor Vitanza, ed. Writing Histories of Rhetoric. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill.: SIU Press, 1994, 8; 10.]
These terms *essentialist* and *constructionist* are not "pure" principles, but function more as "political strategies," or perhaps as rhetorical stances.

Devices through which our students would be expected to join in: peer groups, which were the basis both for small-group discussion in class and for dialogic journals in which they would react to texts read and class discussions/lectures; informal writings, more formal essays, and exams; a portfolio, including essays and a cover essay taking stock of their development as interpreters of literary texts. The principal activity of the class, we told them, was interpretation, and rather than psyching out what they surmise might be our interpretations, they were to come up with their own, and also to be able to account for the basis of that interpretation. By this means, we hoped, the usually unproblematical act of reading could be made more artificial, taking place according to cultural constructions or ideologies.

This approach to teaching a literature course received a mixed response, and we account for this as a function of the rhetoric already inscribed in the classroom, despite our loosely Freirean intentions and practices. We began the semester by wanting to bring into a GE class something of the disciplinary dispute now going on; our positions in this dispute can

best be seen through a description of some of the course practices and student texts, rather than relying solely on theory or statements of intention. Practices speak more loudly and convincingly; it's through practices that our "imaginary relations" are applied to "real conditions."

> Imagine that you enter a classroom. You come late. When you arrive, the students have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about . . .

The metaphor that I want to start with today is an elaboration of one that has already been used--our collaborative effort in teaching Literary Analysis aimed to "make the usually seamless act of reading visible and ideologically bound by emphasizing the constructed nature of interpretation." Students articulated what they thought of as their seamless act of reading in the following ways: "When I began this class, I was asked, 'How do I read'? My reply was 'I just read.' Lacking in technique, I read [what] was in front of me and remembered what I must." [Cited from a retrospective essay by Lynnette Sholtz.] Lynnette came into Literary Analysis with a conception of reading that was seemingly seamless, an even, endlessly flowing, natural act, unimpeded by ideology, seamlessness for both author and reader, teacher and student, no scars, no stitchery, no sutures necessary. Students weren't thinking of a course in literary studies as a fabric that had been pieced together, nor had they thought about texts as pre-fabricated, seamed, made objects. Literature was a natural, inspired kind of thing, written seamlessly by seeming authorities, interpreted whole-cloth by seeming experts, though students could at times intuit a sort of seaminess in the text. But making the seemingly seamless act of reading visible is to examine the line formed by sewing two or more pieces of material together; the seam shows up as a ridge, a line, a groove made by the fitting or joining or sewing; it is evident by the scar, the crack, the fissure, or wrinkle left behind. To be "seamy" is to show that crack, fissure, or mark, to be base, sordid. Our essay, in its collaborative nature, will necessarily be seamed, stitched, not always well-made.

Gary and I worked to piece together a course that asked questions about literature, a course that assumed that both students and teachers are subjects constructed by and awash in ideologies--and our initial plans were to introduce students to our discourse in less formal terms. By foregrounding ideology, we sought to demystify literature, to denaturalize the text. We wanted students to engage fully with their reading behaviors, to become ever more conscious of their work as readers. We wanted, too, to allow students to see how "strong readers" (according to the term used by The Lexington Introduction to Literature) have conversations about literature, to see that reading literature was not some isolated, isolating kind of activity. Hannah Arendt stresses that "for excellence, the presence of others is always required." Ultimately, we wanted students, in our subjecting them to literary analysis and interpretive practice, to become subjects with agency for reading literature.

We provided the sites for student interpretation--dialogic journals, response papers, small group work, and retrospective essays. Scott Thomas chronicles his perspective and practice in the following grudging way: "As odd as it sounds for me to say, I have actually been looking forward to writing this cover essay....From the beginning, I have felt as if I knew what you were looking for in the response papers and formal essays. The problem

was...I didn't feel like I was qualified to produce it. I kept waiting for someone to show me how to interpret better, to read against the grain...but it never happened....Since I have never had a class like this before, your style of teaching was difficult for me to understand and accept."

Moreover, Scott admits to some of the blame; he knows of his resistance, and tells us he has hated English--he has had "four years of it in high school, including advanced placement, and now three semesters of college,...about all I can take." (And to use the phrase "hated English" indicates some of his rhetorical naivete--he doesn't anticipate how such words fall on the reader's ears.) He felt "alienated from the rest of the students all semester....the majority seemed to really enjoy the literature, and further more [sic], they enjoyed discussing it and debating it. I mean they enjoyed it to the point of carrying on discussions before and after class...." The retrospective writing gives us perspective on the resistance--where it sometimes seemed that all students were of the resisting sort, to this student, at least, it appeared that a good time was being had by all but him. In general, though, Scott communicates more than he knows in his final essay: His rhetoric unmasks his unwillingness to be "interpellated" by the class. Interestingly, he is a resisting reader, but the text he resists is the construction of the course itself.

Scott's commentary on his work is consistent with an Althusserian construction of the individual: the subject "'needs' this imaginary transposition of [his] real conditions of existence in order to 'represent [himself]' to [his] real conditions of existence" (241, and Scott needed to write his retrospective essay. Education, particularly the class at hand, is the ideological state apparatus that interpellates the subject, that calls out to Scott, "Hey, you, there...," that names him.

Given that the usual educational ISA is inscribed by one teacher, a single, unitary being, students' troubles with two teachers became the material playing out of the dominant ideology: The plurality did not always play well in Peoria. One teacher, heading up the class, maintains the "imaginary assemblage" (Althusser 240), reifies the "pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence" (240). Two teachers problematize the classroom, pointing up as they do the conversation already in place--two voices already speaking, already engaged. The seams are overt, visible.

> READING FROM CINDY SMITH'S JOURNAL, AN EARLY ENTRY:
> I have never felt so completely helpless, clueless, and in the dark in a class before, as I do in this one. I feel that having 2 professors is just a little bit much and I do feel very discouraged when I hand something in! . . . I feel that this class should be taught in a different way, or at least by just one professor! The only thing to do is keep trying and maybe someday we'll all get it right.

In her writing to the others in her group, Cindy acts as cheerleader, communicates the worry over "the two," and expresses a wish for "fixing" the course. Her worry about the dual leadership implies the interpellation of subjects in the classroom, the concern of who interpellates whom, who speaks from the subject position, and how that all plays out in a

literature class. To get to a discussion of interpellating the subject, Althusser first interrogates the notion of ideology: is it in the realm of the purely imaginary or does ideology have materiality? He comes down on the side of materiality, and that allows him to assert that ideology is an apparatus: he suggests that "what happens to the 'individuals' who live in ideology, i.e. in a determinate (religious, ethical, [educational] etc.) representation of the world whose imaginary distortion depends on their imaginary relation to their conditions of existence, in other words, in the last instance, to the relations of production and to class relations" (242). In other words, we live in the imaginary space, the gauzy misty world, where ideology is "endowed with material existence" (243).

Our departure from the more essentialized modes of teaching resulted in challenges to each other: If I used the term "paradigm," Gary would ask that I "unpack" it for students. When he chose to speak about "adolescent angst," I called a halt and asked for elaboration of the term. Early in the semester, he conducted a New Critical/formalist reading of "Dover Beach" and I presented a post-structuralist approach, a teaching moment that foregrounded the problematics of a move away from dominant teaching practices.

> Suturing in a student journal entry:
> I'm with you on interpretive stances. I was totally lost during lecture. Later I realized that they (prof Wolf and Thompson) were giving a name to the things that we have been doing all along.
>
> I hope I'm not going to get in trouble for what I'm about to say. Sometimes I feel like our class is full of chaos. Sometimes I feel more focus is put on how big of words you use rather than the idea you present.

Kobi Hopkins articulates the difficulties she has pinning down the course, but more importantly, her response contains her attempt to fit her essentialized classroom ideology to our social-constructionist conversation.

Another seam: students in their essentialized view of classroom practices--a wish for order out of seeming chaos, a hope for an individual teacher who would provide the definitive reading of a given piece of literature--communicate a view of literature commensurate with Arnoldian views, literature as venerable, unassailable, literature as outside of history, clean and innocent. Eagleton, in "The Subject of Literature," calls humanists on the carpet for perpetuating the myth of literature as a-political and unideological. While interrogating the propagation of literature as object in itself, Eagleton reminds us that literary texts construct human subjectivities, the way that they come "equipped with...particular practices, techniques, and institutions" (96). For Eagleton, "human subjectivities do not produce themselves; though...the mode of subjectivity...deceives them into believing that they do" (96). The Ideological State Apparatuses that Althusser elaborates become the "moral technologies" that Eagleton espouses. And literature is for Eagleton "one rather important type of moral technology," rooted in its own material practices. "What these techniques at once map and produce, for the ends of social knowledge and order, are certain forms of value and response. With a certificate to provide an individual in English Literature--to give him or her, let us say, a university degree--is to certify--to put on state record--

that he or she has been judged proficient in certain historically specific techniques of sensibility..." (97). In these sorts of material practices, the humanist professor is entitled, according to the ISAs, to produce human subjectivities as he or she has been produced, and what's more to teach a "moral technology of Literature [that will] produce an historically peculiar form of human subject who is sensitive, receptive, imaginative and so on...about nothing in particular" (98). The moral technology supported by such a view allows literature to continue to be innocent, a-historical, a-political, and allows the teachers and readers and students of literature to assume the same pose. Thus subjectivities are "radically depoliticized."

Seams again:

From Cathy Moroschan's Heart of Darkness paper:

When I was passed from the person sitting above me in class the sheet of paper that explained our second formal essay, I looked at it, scared. This book by Conrad had been very frustrating to me, I understood it. I got meaning out of it, but for me to put my thoughts and feeling [sic] about it one paper in an essay seemed very frustrating at that moment. *[Cathy's dilemma begins upon reading the assignment sheet which seemed to be talking to, interpellating someone other than herself. Somehow the reader implied in the assignment was a reader who had something to say about Heart, and could bring other theory to bear on the central text. That was a conversation that eluded Cathy. The "hey, you there' of the writing assignment called on Cathy, included her in a conversation that she had trouble interpreting.]*

[Cathy sets out to compare the novel to the film version, but before that discourse can take place, she brings in the monologic Cliff's notes to help her gain access to the conversation:]

I, too, wanted to bring into my paper another source of understanding, Cliff Notes [sic]. Cliff Notes have long been doomed by teachers but my understanding is not clear on this. I have read Heart of Darkness and I was confused on some points so purchasing the cliff notes seemed to me the same thing as looking up an unfamiliar word in the dictionary. *[Instead of reading a critical essay on Heart of Darkness. Cathy feels driven to the scorned Cliff's Notes, a place she understands constructs students' desperation, and shapes subjectivities not approved of by teachers, nevertheless, she is candid about the problem of such a source. She wants to inhabit the meaning of Heart, feels that somehow the professors have kept meaning from her, and hopes that Cliff's Notes will provide an effective gloss on the material. And the essay goes on to point out the symbols that cathy missed in her reading...]*

[She recognizes the problematics of depending on Cliff's Notes:] Disadvantages of cliff notes [sic] would be the lack of personal achievement. *[Evidence of ideological cult of individualism.]* It is so easy to accept the author of the cliff notes as the true reading. *[Evidence of literature as object...]* If that was how the reader was looking at this them this just puts us back to the beginning of the class because the thing that we talked about most this semester was strong readings, what we interpreted in a reading.

[And when she does begin to compare novel to film,

Cathy's writing betrays additional difficulties:] I also believe the Heart of Darkness and Apocalypse Now have some similarities and also some differences. Right from the beginning of the movie the name Kurtz is menchioned [sic]. Kurtz had went [sic] crazy in the movie it was because of the stress of the Vietnam war. He started to play god with the people. Cars [sic] was an educated and smart person and he would have been someone high if he could have kept from going insane. Marlow was sent to kill Cars because of his problem.

[Here the film and the novel are collapsed the one into other. Terms such as "menchioned" betray the heard language that is the student's lexicon--"Cars" indicates the same orthographic naivete. "Could have been someone high" implies the hierarchy, the class system supported by the dominant ideology.]

[And as the essay winds to its close, the reader has glimpses of the student speaking the dominant ideology:]

Women and blacks in this book were treated fairly similar. In one part of the book it was said to keep the women in that perfect little world of their own. The blacks also were treated as if they didn't have the right to know what was going on and were treated badly. For example, a quote from the book says, "One came to hate these savages-hate them to death." Savages? I don't think that blacks are anymore savages that [sic] the whites because they weren't treating anyone the way whites were treating them.... [Here Cathy speaks the dominant ideology that gives lip service to equality regardless of skin color. Rather than engage in an interpretive practice, she speaks her culture.]

[Her closing comes back to the way she has been interpellated:]

If I was not pushed to find a deeper meaning in the book I am afraid that I would not have learned the whole story. This book has bushed [sic] me harder than I had ever been pushed before, to find a greater meaning than just what the words say. *[I tease her in the margins--maybe "bushed" is exactly the right word after all! But the closing sentences are telling in the way that they reinscribe "deep meaning" rather than constructed, negotiated meaning, and the implication that she has learned the "whole story." Cathy interpellates herself as a subject who has been pushed beyond words, a position that still clings to essentialized, objectified teaching of literature...That the individual can unearth truth, deep meaning, transcendental unity. She still subscribes to seamless reading that will reveal meaning. She may have some stirring of consciousness that to read <u>Cliff's Notes</u> is to enter into a conversation of sorts, but...]*

And we've left Scott Thomas in stitches...

In the midst of his vigorous retelling of his experience in Literary Analysis, Scott Thomas had the feeling "that someone was trying to mold me into something I don't want to be. Intellectual was a term used frequently in class to describe readers of great literature, and possibly viewers of 'Northern Exposure'. Truthfully, I hate that show and I couldn't figure out why we were watching it. I consider myself to be fairly intelligent, but an intellectual, as this class seemed to define it, probably not. I would like to think that there are intellectuals of all different types, even perhaps some that have never picked up an English book." Scott

is feeling some coercion in the way he is being interpellated. "Hey, you there," becomes "hey, you intellectual," an interpellation he has not freely chosen for himself. Scott's ideas ran counter to the material practices and material rituals of the classroom. In the term "intellectual" he felt that we had misrecognized him, misnamed him.

[Gramsci--"all humans are intellectuals; only some persons are paid to do intellectual work." (11) (Crowley's paraphrase, from somewhere in Selections from the Prison Notebooks.)]

> Imagine that, finally, the discussion peters out and the students begin to put their books into their backpacks. The end of class approaches, you must depart. And you do depart, with a discussion still vigorously in progress, but not the one you initiated.
>
> "Sorry I had to miss class today. Did we talk about anything important?"

The "conversation" we found ourselves immersed in, like any real conversation, didn't go according to the agenda we had in mind. Our parable had to be edited, on the fly. Rather than having them join our conversation, we found that, in order to have a successful class, our conversation had to be integrated into theirs (plural).

"One concept that I understood and embraced was that reading is an interactive not just a reactive process." (Christine Krause). Some were looking to us to give them our interpretations, expressing impatience when we tried to wait them out:

> What I can say about this class, is that it wasn't at all what I thought it was going to be like. I did learn about ideologies, repertoiters [sic], and interpretative stances. I like the idea of groups but we never had enough time to develop any ideas. It would have been nice if we feedback [sic] from the professors as far as what they thought. (Jennifer Barr)

The logic in some cases ran like this: why should I waste time hearing other students' opinions or supplying my own, when it's the professors' opinion that will count. To translate this back into terms of Burke's parable, some students did what "you" does there, waiting an opening and then "put[ting their] oar in"; others did what often happens when we are at a social or cultural event at which people are talking about subjects we know and care little about--they hung back and hoped to avoid having to say anything. When forced to respond, the result was sometimes resistance--in the journals, in the end-of-semester essays, on student evaluations, and during discussion. ["I'm an English major, and I don't know what the hell is going on," to paraphrase one especially vocal class member.]

Our students were (for the most part) prepared to learn interpretations, not make them--that is, they brought a certain stock of cultural capital into the class, i.e. that professors teach and students learn, that we were hired to give them the right readings of texts, not to have them tell us theirs, and we in effect devalued their currency.

The problem with Burke's parable, at least in our use of it, begins with the first word--"Imagine." It's abstracted from any real situation. *You* have no history. "Imagine that *you* enter a parlor." Aside from the fact that no one has parlors any more, where do *you* enter it

from? What is *your* gender, race, class, economic status? Did you just come from working out, from working, from a meeting at the state capitol? Are you grounded in some sort of discourse, just unfamiliar with this variety? Are those engaged in the conversation people that you know? Or are they representative types that you have met before?

In other words, the parable has to be imaginary, because it resembles no real conversation. Conversations aren't just dialogue: they inscribe in the words and gestures some roles between the conversants. Much of what goes on in conversations is what Althusser calls interpellation, the *Hey, you there!* of address which enscribes the one interpellated (interpellee ?) within ideology.

Not only do exchanges in conversations interpellate those participating--in Burke's instance, as those who are already participants and the neophyte who is waiting her/his chance to enter the lists--but the cultural geography of the classroom also interpellates students and instructors. We found that it's not so easy to escape this inscription [conscription? subscription? subjection?] --you can't do it by putting a persuasive bit of discourse onto the overhead, or declaring that the rules are changed for this term, because they do go on to other courses. The forms of the educational institution speak more loudly and persuasively than we could.

The journals and other assignments, and a signaled openness on our part to hear their interpretations, indicated that they could say what they were thinking; and they did, eventually (somewhat to our chagrin). But that doesn't indicate a failure, on our or their parts--it indicates that we need to join their conversation, not insist that they join ours. Or, rather, we need to bring these various sorts of conversation into relation with each other, without assuming that "academic discourse" will dominate. Students are interpellated by the institutional structure as students, which means we're doing the intellectual work of the class and they are allowed to overhear and praise--perhaps in the mode of John Stuart Mill's understanding of the lyric poet as "not heard but overheard." But if we conceive of our work as questioning ideologies, we may give students the wherewithal to participate in their education with more open eyes (and ears), to be interpellated as "strong readers," perhaps. Rather than the students being the neophytes waiting their chances to Interpret Literature, we had the opportunity (obligation, really) to enter a wider cultural conversation in which their ideological assumptions about literature, usually suppressed or hidden to some degree, were brought out. Some of what they said and wrote (indexes of their ideologies) went along these lines: a) reading and interpretation are separable; reading is what consumers of texts do for "fun," while professors and intellectuals "analyze" texts; b) preferences for one text or interpretation over another are a matter of taste, and taste is natural (not constructed); c) self-consciously interpreting literature would mean they would have to become "intellectuals," to question their beliefs and ways of seeing the world, whereas what they wanted was to satisfy a three-hour requirement towards a degree and a job--in other words, they wanted seamless interpretations, not "three credits and a headache." [Tammy Henderson]

I suppose I agree with E. D. Hirsch to some extent: texts do exist physically prior to the reader's consciousness of them as texts. However, to exist as literature means that they are interpreted according to conventions through which those texts are comprehended. The form in which a text exists prior to its interpretation is of no use to anyone: it's like a printed

musical score, which is not "music" even in anyone's head, much less in performance. To be *music* requires performance. To be literature requires the equivalent of performance, interpretation.

As our reading of our students' reading of our classroom shows, literature does ideological work, frequently several sorts at once. When considered according to the Arnoldian or essentialist paradigm which has been dominant in Anglo-American literary studies for much of this century (at least), it represents "the best that has been thought and said," which brings literature within the rhetoric of reification. What this slogan does is to take an arguable statement (what's "the best"?) and convert it to an object, in effect taking readers out of the conversation (that particular conversation) about value.

Understating the rhetorical status of literary texts is choosing one rhetorical position established as an effect of the dominant ideology, i.e., literary texts within the framework of essentialism. Education, in the "banking" mode, provides the opportunity to accumulate cultural capital by appreciating aesthetic objects which can be consumed in one's leisure time. The source text (context, pretext) allows a taste for the imaginative (imaginary?) to be indulged, but safely separated from the *real world*. Auden's famous statement asserts the separation of the esthetic from the political--"Art is not life, and cannot be / A midwife to society, / For art is a fait accompli" (Auden). Still within the domain of the esthetic, but a little further down the canonical pecking-order, is Archibald MacLeish's "A poem should not mean / But be," which the iconoclast Howard Nemerov points out is a meaningful statement. These do the ideological work of indicating that "life" is one thing, "art" another--they are essentialist categories, the texts are objects.

The literary text is considered as an object of contemplation, with the paradigm being Keats' Grecian Urn--but Keats' poem may be put to a different use under a constructivist paradigm. Like the parabolic tree which falls in the forest, the urn (or the poem) is a textual object which is only completed when it registers in a consciousness. Even under an essentialist paradigm, then, literary texts have their meaning in relation to readers; they are therefore rhetorical, and their rhetorical status would be even more strongly the case under a constructivist paradigm. What still needs doing is the placing of the "work" that these texts do into specific cultural and institutional contexts.